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PUBLIC LAW 109-95

## HIGHLY VULNERABLE CHILDREN: 2008 ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

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### Introduction

Disease, conflict and violence, natural disaster, and severe economic strife leave millions of the world's youngest people without parents or caregivers. Millions of children in the developing world are orphaned in some capacity and have lost the care and support of one or both parents. More alarmingly, children all across the globe are living fragile lives, vulnerable to a multitude of adversities – be it disease, death, conflict, poverty, or other reason. As such, they face serious risks to their survival and well-being. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is the lead U.S. Government (USG) agency supporting Public Law 109-95, the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Developing Countries Act, signed in November 2005 and enacted because of the need to more effectively coordinate USG assistance for orphans and vulnerable children, particularly – but not limited to – those affected by HIV and AIDS. Accordingly, the objective of USG assistance to highly vulnerable children (HVC) in developing countries is to open up opportunities for them to lead healthy, productive lives. Addressing their urgent humanitarian needs – a necessary first response – will not in itself improve their long-term prospects or prevent increases in the number of highly vulnerable children in the future.

For this reason, USG assistance addresses immediate consequences of vulnerability through direct service delivery. It addresses causes of vulnerability through activities that employ diplomacy and policy and expand our knowledge through research, demonstration, and information dissemination. Finally, USG assistance addresses the ability of families,

*In fiscal year 2007, the U.S. Government spent more than \$5.9 billion on foreign assistance programs to improve the lives of children and their families throughout the world.*



Vulnerable children spanning a range of ages stand in front of their village dwelling.

MARY JORDAN/USAID

communities, and governments to care for their children and improve their future well-being through capacity building and through integration of programs for highly vulnerable children with other development programs.

### Challenges Affecting Highly Vulnerable Children in the Developing World

#### Stigma

Targeting the most vulnerable children can draw undue attention to their status and stigmatize them in their communities or among their peers. This is an often-documented concern for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS because families and communities view such children as “unclean” or bringing misfortune to the village, but it is also relevant to children made vulnerable by other causes. For example, evidence has shown that when former child soldiers are targeted, a double-edged stigma is created. Community and family perceptions that they are exceptionally dangerous or otherwise “damaged” are reinforced, and an impression is created that

children who perpetrated crimes are being rewarded. In addition, targeting only some groups of vulnerable children, such as those orphaned by AIDS, in a situation of widespread poverty may result in communities actually resenting these orphans for any special treatment they receive.

### ***The Global Food Crisis***

The rapid increase globally in food prices has a dual impact on the most vulnerable populations: Donor dollars buy less food, and as local foods become more expensive, more families experience a food deficit. In the past year, the price of rice has grown by more than 100 percent and the price of wheat by 130 percent. Such increases, in addition to the rising price of fuel and transport, mean that even significant dollar increases in food assistance do not cover the gap. There are no quick fixes for this problem, but USG agencies have placed substantial emphasis on helping the most vulnerable families through economic strengthening and livelihood interventions to make them more resilient to food price increases.

### ***Finding and Serving Hard-to-Reach Children***

Some groups of children are particularly difficult to reach, including stateless children, children in countries with political or civil instability, military children (because of issues of access to military bases), children in places where government is distrusted, and children in remote areas where host country social services are particularly weak. USG agencies have used a variety of approaches to address access problems, including collaboration with local experts who are trusted by the communities and authorities; heavy reliance on international non-governmental organizations and their local partners for program implementation; and in the case of military children, when denied military bases access, set up of projects in neighborhoods near military bases, where many military families live and retire.

## **Highlights of USG Programs Serving Highly Vulnerable Children**

### ***U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)***

In fiscal year (FY) 2007, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief increased funding for orphans and vulnerable

children (OVC) in the 15 focus countries, serving an estimated 2.7 million children. For all countries (focus countries and other bilateral program countries), PEPFAR committed \$278.3 million in FY 2007 to OVC programs. Similarly, it more than doubled funding for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (\$214 million in FY 2007 in all countries) and for pediatric HIV/AIDS treatment and care (\$126.5 million).

In the 15 focus countries, PEPFAR supported training or retraining for nearly 215,000 individuals in caring for OVC, promoting the use of time- and labor-saving technologies, supporting income-generating activities, and connecting children and families to essential health care and other basic social services.

In FY 2007, for the first time, PEPFAR focused on improving the quality of OVC programs by requiring partners to track and report on how many of the following seven key interventions they provided: food and nutrition, shelter and care, protection, health care, psychosocial support, education and vocational training, and economic strengthening. Of children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS who received direct support from PEPFAR, nearly half received three or more of these services.

### ***U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL's) Child Labor Projects***

Department of Labor's international child labor projects prevented or withdrew 229,000 children from exploitive child labor by providing them with education and/or training opportunities. This brought the total number of children protected or withdrawn from exploitive child labor since the inception of DOL's program in 1995 to nearly 1.1 million. Children served by these projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East were working or at risk of working in places such as mines, commercial plantations, and manufacturing workshops. Others were exploited or at risk of exploitation in trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, involvement in armed conflict, and commercial sexual exploitation.

### ***Department of State's (DOS's) Trafficking in Persons (TIP)***

Department of State continues to focus on victim protection as an integral part of the USG's efforts to combat child trafficking. For instance, DOS' annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report

## **Defining Highly Vulnerable Children**

Highly vulnerable children are those children under age 18 whose safety, well-being, or development is at significant risk due to inadequate care, protection, or access to "essential services." "Essential services" are globally agreed-upon inputs that children need to grow into contributing members of society and include education, food, nutrition, shelter; protection, health care, livelihood opportunities, and psychosocial support. Highly vulnerable children include those who are orphaned; receive inadequate adult support because of death, abandonment, economic distress, or chronic illness; have HIV/AIDS or are suspected of having HIV; are directly affected by armed conflict; live outside of family care; or have suffered, in some other way, from a collapse of traditional social safety nets in their communities. Therefore, highly vulnerable children refers to a broad range of children made vulnerable by any of a variety of causes.

# Strategic Guidelines for Providing USG Assistance to Highly Vulnerable Children

## 1. Focus on stressed communities

Because stable communities are more likely to be able to provide services, the USG in general gives higher priority to HVC in communities under stress. One of the highest priorities for USG assistance is Darfur, where years of conflict have resulted in the displacement of thousands of families into camps for refugees and internally displaced persons.

## 2. Reliance on local institutions or communities to determine the most vulnerable children and the most-needed services

Because conditions that affect children's vulnerability are unique to each country and community situation, engaging community members in identifying the most vulnerable children and assessing their needs help to ensure effective resource use.

## 3. Preference for family/household care rather than institutional care

When feasible, assistance programs are designed to enable vulnerable children to remain in a family situation, where they can form bonds with consistent, loving caretakers. For this reason, the USG views family reunification or placement within the extended family as the first option to consider. Alternative family-based options, such as adoption (preferably domestic, but also including inter-country), are an appropriate permanency option for children who cannot be reunited with kin, while temporary institutional care is considered only when other family-based options have failed. To ensure that appropriate alternative care options are available and accessible, the USG supports professional efforts to strengthen the child protection and welfare policy and regulatory frameworks of countries where there are significant numbers of orphans and other highly vulnerable children. The USG also works to strengthen the human and institutional capacities of both governmental organizations and NGOs to ensure that these policies and mechanisms are implemented effectively on behalf of children.

## 4. Preference for a development approach that creates ownership and limits dependency

While humanitarian needs often dictate the direct provision of essential services to save the lives of HVC, the USG gives priority to directing resources in ways that strengthen the ability of local communities and indigenous institutions so that they can continue to meet these needs themselves. This often requires assistance aimed at building the capacities of communities and institutions.

## 5. Adherence to the five key strategies of the Framework for Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living in a World of HIV and AIDS

While these internationally accepted strategies were designed for children affected by HIV/AIDS, in most cases they are relevant to USG programs for children made vulnerable by other causes. The strategies are:

- To strengthen capacity of families to protect and care for vulnerable children by prolonging the lives of parents and providing economic, psychosocial, and other support.
- To mobilize and support community-based responses.
- To ensure access for vulnerable children to essential services, such as education, health care, birth registration, and others.
- To ensure that governments protect the most vulnerable children through improved policy and legislation and by channeling resources to families and communities.
- To raise awareness at all levels through advocacy and social mobilization to create a supportive environment for HVC and their families.

## 6. Strengthening of partnerships and knowledge exchange between implementing organizations that are primarily child centered and those that focus on economic empowerment

Child-centered implementing organizations often lack expertise in addressing economic issues that households with HVC face. Similarly, organizations that specialize in economic empowerment typically do not address the social and health needs of children. Consequently, development of partnerships, shared training, and exchange of information among these different groups can increase program effectiveness.

## 7. Taking gender into consideration

The gender of a vulnerable child and of his or her caretaker can have a major impact on access to essential services as well as program structure. USG agencies strive to design programs with these differences in mind.



Download the full report:  
*“Supporting Highly Vulnerable Children:  
 Progress, Promise and Partnership”* at  
[http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PDACM265.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACM265.pdf).

is an important diplomatic tool for continued dialogue about HVC. The TIP Report provides guidance to help countries focus resources on prosecution, protection, and prevention programs and policies. The 2007 TIP Report indicates that diplomatic approaches to combating trafficking that rely on compliance with labor standards, if undertaken in a setting of inadequate enforcement, can be weak because these approaches fail to punish those responsible for trafficking.

#### ***Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)***

The programs, diplomatic engagement, and advocacy efforts by PRM on behalf of refugees, conflict victims, internally displaced persons, stateless individuals, and vulnerable migrants – many of whom are women and children – provide protection and assistance to those in need as well as seek to achieve durable solutions for many others. Specifically, PRM has developed policies and programs that address gender-based violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation and antitrafficking initiatives, as well as activities that focus on education and protection of conflict-affected children. In addition, PRM is currently working with nongovernmental organization partners to implement an Action Plan on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of beneficiary populations in order to increase partners’ accountability and commitment to this important issue.

#### ***USAID Office of Food For Peace***

Funding for food aid aimed at the most vulnerable populations, including Food For Peace Title II Emergency programs and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, increased 10 to 15 percent, although increasing food and shipping costs erased the impact of these increases. The Administration has requested an additional

\$395 million in PL 480 Title II Food Aid and \$150 million in development assistance to help address the impact of high global food prices on food security. USAID has put together a Food Security Task Force to lead its efforts to address the immediate emergency needs and to support the longer-term development programs necessary to mitigate the root causes of chronic food security, in collaboration with interagency counterparts, for a comprehensive USG response.

#### ***Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF)***

In 2007, USAID/DCOF programmed \$16 million for 16 countries. The DCOF supports technical assistance for initiatives to benefit vulnerable children, especially children trapped by armed conflict, children on the streets or at risk of moving onto the streets, and children without family care or who are at risk of being placed in an institution. DCOF funds projects that demonstrate innovative techniques that are replicable on a wider scale, with the support of other donors.

#### ***U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)***

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides post-arrival services to refugee adults, families, and children who are unable to safely repatriate to their country of origin or integrate into the country to which they fled. In FY 2007, ORR provided employment services to approximately 96,000 refugees, thus stabilizing many vulnerable refugee families in the United States by enabling caregivers to obtain work so that they were able to provide for their children. Of refugees who arrived in FY 2007, about 43 percent were children under 18, including 65 unaccompanied refugee children. Asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and victims of severe forms of human trafficking access ORR’s refugee services and benefits; these groups are included in the above figures.